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Housekeepers' Chat

Tuesday, April 15, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "The Homemaking and Her Goal." Quotations from article by Lita Bane.

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"Keeping house," said my friend, "is sometimes a discouraging business. There comes a time when every woman thinks she is being taken for granted -- that nobody cares what she gets out of life, so long as she cooks three good meals a day, and has them ready on time."

Well, I've felt that way myself -- haven't you? But not for long. "Keeping house" has its compensations.

The other day I read an article which I wish every housekeeper -- no, let's say homemaker -- might read. From this article, I have borrowed a few paragraphs to share with you.

"I sometimes think," writes Lita Bane, the author of this article, "I sometimes think that home and families furnish the greatest motive power in the world -- greater than steam, greater than electricity, or anything else. Incentives to work come largely from a desire to give our families what they need and will enjoy. Some of our finest rewards come from their enjoyment of what we have done for them. The very center of our universe is usually our homes. If you've ever worked at the next desk, when a man's wife or child is ill, and have seen him try vainly to keep his mind on his work, you realize how vital are the forces at work in family life. Or if you've even seen this same man at home, if he shows you his garden, his workshop, the slide he made for his children, if you've seen his pride and satisfaction in the hospitality his wife extends to you -- you know what some men live for.

"I have often wished," continues the writer, "that a professional spirit could be developed among homemakers to give them a pride in their work such as physicians, nurses, and teachers feel in theirs. These professions are motivated by a great desire to serve mankind.... It is a solemn responsibility and a great honor to have the health and the education of the people intrusted to you."

I shall skip a few paragraphs here -- to the next column, wherein Miss Bane asks this question: "Do not homemakers need a professional attitude, access to special training in some form, greater appreciation of the importance of their job? Do not homes need a well-defined purpose?"

"I get so discouraged," said one wife. "I knew I was a successful mathematics teacher, but I don't know whether I'm a successful homemaker or not. I wish there were some standards for success such as I had in teaching!"

Though no standards are to be had, as yet, Miss Bane makes a few suggestions for our consideration. Let's run over them quickly.

In the first place since you and I and our neighbor homemakers do 85 per cent of the retail buying, we should have knowledge of the value and use of money. A certain judge has estimated that 90 per cent of the domestic upsets that bring people to his court arise from money difficulties. Many women need to be impressed with the fact that money is an important tool that must be used skillfully, if the results are not to be disappointing. Some women, unaccustomed to handling money, have a somewhat frivolous attitude toward it.

This reminds me of something I heard the other day. There's a certain man in our city who makes a salary of \$5,000 a year. Does his wife know it? She does not. "She thinks I'm still making \$4,500," the man told me. "If it weren't for that extra \$500 she knows nothing about, I couldn't make ends meet."

Are you surprised at his statement? I was. I told him so. He replied that there are many men in a similar position.

Well, to continue with Miss Bane's article. She says that invention has served the housewife until there seems to be a gadget for every chore, and a specialist for every gadget. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker can scarcely recognize the new experts that have been added to their number -- the canner, the plumber, the electrician, and all the others you know so well.

How do the new inventions affect you and me and our neighbors? We must be able to take proper care of our machinery. Most difficult of all, we must know when to call in help from an expert. The electric iron may refuse to heat. Is a fuse blown? We should be able to replace it.

Another thing we should know is how to choose equipment necessary for efficient housekeeping.

Will you give special attention to the next paragraph? There are very few of us it doesn't "hit."

"War, furious and uncompromising war, should be waged against broken-down egg beaters, dull paring knives, and the hundred and one incompetent tools that the housekeeper too often gets along with. Take a long look into your kitchen table drawer. Is everything there shipshape -- nothing worn out, annoying because it doesn't work well? Everything the best you can afford? How much irritation and fatigue the average homemaker would save herself, were she to keep herself always provided with tools in good condition. And many of them are so cheap that the price of one movie show would supply one or more of them. Is your home mechanically efficient?"

That's all of that paragraph. You see why I asked you to give it special attention. I wonder why it is that most women are so careless about their kitchen tools -- every once in a while I find myself using an old worn-out piece of kitchen equipment which would cost only 25 or 30 cents to replace.

On to the next paragraph, about our responsibilities as homemakers:

"We all need milk, and growing children need it in considerable quantities. We all need fresh fruits and vegetables. It goes without saying that homemakers should know the simple principles of adequate nutrition. It isn't just cooking that counts. It's proteins and vitamins and calories, and the rest, all considered and cooked in proper proportions, flavored and garnished and served."

"Science has crossed the kitchen's threshold, telling the cook what foods our bodies need, and placing upon her the responsibility of making these foods so attractive that the family cannot refuse -- a much more complicated task in many ways than the old way, but relieved again by science, for through new methods of preserving and handling and shipping foods, much of the work is done outside the home, leaving only the finishing touches to be added.

"The homemaker should know the factors that contribute to sound physical health, to ways to prevent spread of diseases. William has a cold -- must the three other children have colds too? What precautions can she take to prevent it?"

Miss Bane mentions another thing that adds greatly to the success of a home -- an appreciation of beauty of color, line and texture.

"Do you know rooms that almost make you dizzy when you go into them? 'I felt this room needed something, so I put that vase on the piano,' said a woman whose living room was a riot. Apparently she had 'felt that the room needed something' many times, but never had felt that it needed to have something taken out. So you had a confused jumble of things and more things, until your weary eyes were forced to fasten their attention on one small flower in the rug, if you were to have any sense of quiet at all.

"The homemaker needs to know the fundamental psychological principles involved in child training. It is as true today, as it was 45 years ago when Olive Schreiner wrote of motherhood: 'It is the work that demands the broadest culture... The souls of little children are marvelously delicate and tender things, and keep forever the shadow that first falls on them, and that is the mother's.'"

There are many more good paragraphs in Miss Bane's article, but I have time for only one more:

"What about it all, anyway?" asks Miss Bane.

"Are we going to allow homemaking to drift along without any effort on the part of those most concerned to direct it into the channels they believe to be best for all of us, or are we going to wrestle with the problem, re-define the purpose of the home in the light of present-day needs, then trim our sails one and all to direct our course to the desired port?"

That's all I'll quote from Miss Bane today. Just between you and me, I think we can answer her question. Give us time to become adjusted to the new order of things, to organize our problems, and we can "set the homemaking standards of the future."

Wednesday: "Concerning the Care of Children."

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